Fostering Writing Across the Curriculum
‘A school-based Action Research Project’
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Literacy in the middle school classroom

- some research

• Yr 7 students were expected to work more independently than Yr 6 students… They were given less support and guidance.
• Yr 6 students wrote more pieces of extended writing.
• Yr 7 students wrote more ‘short answer pieces’

Literacy in transition (Cairney et al)

- Considerations

• ‘A writer’s brain is like a magician’s hat. If you’re going to get anything out of it, you have to put something in first’ L’Amour, 1990
• Each KLA has its own form of curriculum literacy and its own way of viewing the world
• Great care needs to be taken when selecting literacy strategies, because the inappropriate selection of strategies can detract from learning experiences.

Middle School students and literacy

• It is critical that middle & secondary school teachers recognise the diversity of language development of their students… Literacy for adolescents means that nothing should be taken for granted.
• For students mastering a KLA means mastering its specific literacies.

Our boys as literacy teachers

On structure
• Teach writing structures – this is the most important part.
• Put useful hints for writing structures on the board.
• Show them the structures for different text types.
• Discuss good ways to plan out a story.

On practice and feedback
• Practice, practice, practice.
• Give individual comments on a student’s work and show them how to improve it.
• Constantly encourage them
• Peer feedback to help students improve
On teacher PD

Teachers generally want professional development that:

• Is classroom-based, strategy-oriented and practical.
• Is provided by experts and/or other teachers to directly support their current needs.
• Involves learning from others’ experience through networking, visiting and observing.

Students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms (McArthur, Sheehan, Loretta Giorcelli, Sue Smith)

Activity

• Working with a colleague, discuss the issues you see with the development of writing skills and literacy in your subject area.
• What are the areas of focus that you would like to see developed and think would have an impact in your current teaching environment?

Background to this Research

• A need to better understand what motivates our boys to write;
• A need to understand their degree of skill, knowledge and confidence in relation to the process of writing, across a range of curriculum areas?
• We are using a form of ‘Action Research’ in the Junior & Middle School which feeds the findings back into the Teaching and Learning process at the school.

The Learning Triangle

Learner’s Brain - Mind
Teacher’s Instruction
Instructional Materials, Tools & Curriculum

The Learning Triangle – Berninger, Stage, Smith & Hildreth, 2001

Developing an Understanding of the Writing Process

“Equally important to fostering a climate conducive to writing and sharing is ensuring that all students understand the complexity of the writing process. Many students hold the naïve view that professional authors complete their publish pieces after composing one draft and doing some minor revisions.” (Graham, MacArthur & Fitzgerald, p.33, 2007)

What can we do as Teachers?

Teachers must demystify the writing process for students, by teaching them that regardless how skilled they become, all students will need to utilise a process, adapted to their needs, in order to develop manuscripts.

They will go through several stages of revision, they will seek the responses of others and continually edit and revise their work, eventually realising that writing is never perfect and always open to revision.

As the French poet Valéry stated

“A poem is never complete; it is just abandoned”.

**Approach**

- Through the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data, it allowed us to best represent and interpret the ‘writing of our boys’ across the Middle School.
- We also investigated the same items with Year 6 students to see if there are any major differences in the transition from JS to MS.

**Types of item included**

- Rating scales (using a 0%, 10%, 20%, … confidence scale across a range of items that made reference to their writing confidence, self-efficacy and their use of strategies.
- Also various items that allowed them to reflect upon, and list their favourite topic areas to write about combined with their own perception of how they would ‘teach writing for a day’

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**Their confidence and perceptions**

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<th>YR8</th>
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<td>7.43</td>
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<td>Improve</td>
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**Importance, at home and strategies**

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<td>Strategies</td>
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**Images, Experiences and Reading**

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<tr>
<td>Experiences</td>
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**Topics, Music and Boredom**

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<tr>
<td>Pick own topics</td>
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<td>7.15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Listening to music</td>
<td>6.08</td>
<td>6.50</td>
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Thinking, Selecting and Understanding

Detail, Sentences and Editing

Their Concentration & Use of Computers

Areas that they like to write about?

- Adventure
- Crime stories
- Fact and fiction
- School
- Childhood
- Adventure
- History
- Images
- Sport
- Books fiction
- Comics
- Sport
- Science
- Made up Adventures
- Skateboarding
- My pets
- My friends
- My suburb
- Action
- Adventure
- Mystery
- Mills & Boons
- Movies
- Holidays
- The future
- Technology
- Computer games

What would they like help with?

- If I was a teacher I think I would first teach structures of writings as this is one of the most important parts of writing and because I found this skill very helpful.
- I would give them all a thesaurus each to read and teach them techniques on how to structure their writing.
- Make them write about something that they enjoy and get them to use sentence structure, paragraphs, etc.
- Telling the how to plan things and write the stages out then practice it.

So what is the data suggesting?

- We need to examine the confidence and belief systems of the students (as well as grades and effort).
- Confidence and self-efficacy is driven by motivation (both intrinsic and extrinsic!)
- We need to be explicit in what and how teach!
**FACTORS THAT HAVE AN INFLUENCE ON THEIR WRITING**

I can write well, wish I could improve & I am quite good compared to my peers – Yr7

I can write well, wish I could improve & I am quite good compared to my peers – Yr8

**Importance, home & strategies – Year 7**

**Importance, home & strategies – Yr 8**

**Images, experiences and their reading – Yr 7**

**Images, experiences and their reading – Yr8**
Topics, listening to music and finding writing boring – Yr 7

- Pick my own topics
- Listening to music
- Writing is boring

Ideas, Information & Questions – Yr7

- Difficult to think of ideas
- Select the right information
- Understand the questions

Detail, Sentences and Editing – Yr 7

- Adding detail
- Construct sentences
- More changes - need

Topics, listening to music and finding writing boring – Yr 8

- Pick my own topics
- Listening to music
- Writing is boring

Ideas, Information & Questions – Yr 8

- Difficult to think of ideas
- Select the right information
- Understand the questions

Detail, Sentences and Editing – Yr8

- Adding detail
- Construct sentences
- More changes - need
Concentration & Using a computer – Yr7

YR7 (L) YR7 (M) YR7 (H)

Concentrate for a long time
Easier using a computer

Concentration & Using a computer – Yr 8

YR8 (L) YR8 (M) YR8 (H)

Concentrate for a long time
Easier using a computer

Some strategies that may help!

*Writing Next: Effective Strategies to Improve Writing of Adolescents in Middle and High Schools*


Thanks

• Questions, comments, suggestions please?
• Please feel free to contact us on the following emails below

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